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anomalous phenomena.
We consider:
any theories.
We accept:
normal proofs,
exact references.*

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FROM THE HISTORY OF THE UFO PROBLEM

SOVIET UFOLOGY IN ITS HUMAN DIMENSIONS*

Vladimir V. Rubtsov

1. A Memoir

On February 29, 1968 I read, as always, the leading daily of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union — *Pravda*. To my surprise, in this issue there appeared an article on the UFO problem, entitled '"Flying Saucers" Again?' and signed by three scientists — E.Mustel, D.Martynov, and V.Leshkovtsev [1]. Indignantly condemning "absurd, long-buried gossip about secret excursions of Martians or Venusians to our planet", the article concluded: "All objects flying over the territory of our country are identified either by scientists, or by the people responsible for security of our Motherland. If "unidentified flying objects" had really existed, scientists would have been first to obtain all information on them and investigate their nature."

That was bad news, though not unexpected. A few months earlier, in October 1967, there had been formed in Moscow the first Soviet public organization designed to collect and analyze UFO reports: the UFO Department of the All-Union Space-Exploration Committee of the USSR Voluntary Society of Support to the Army, Aviation & Navy (DOSAAF). It embraced more than two hundred scientists, engineers, military, journalists, etc. Its elected head was Major-General P.A.Stolyarov, his Deputy for Science was Dr. F.Y.Zigel. On November 10 they spoke on Central TV about the new organization and invited UFO observers to send in reports.

Such reports did arrive and were used by Zigel to prepare the first volume of the typewritten collection *UFO Observations in the USSR* [2]. But in the meantime backstairs forces were at work, and in November the Central Committee of DOSAAF disbanded the UFO Department. Some time later the Branch of General & Applied Physics of the USSR Academy of Sciences passed a resolution against UFO research in the Soviet Union.

Until the Party authorities stated their opinion on this subject, those who believed that UFOs were a legitimate subject for study could feel the game was not wholly lost. There followed a series of discussions and statements by both advocates and opponents of the UFO inquiry. Surely, we argued, the matter could be thrashed out in open debate? It was not to be. The article I read in *Pravda* that morning crushed our naive hopes.

Two of its authors were really prominent astronomers, even if complete ignoramuses as far as the UFO problem was concerned. But it wasn't their names or their qualifications which carried weight: it was the voice of Authority, informing every Soviet citizen that the so-called "flying saucers" would from now on be considered as nonexistent.

Replying to the letter I sent him immediately after reading the article, Dr. Zigel wrote: "This article expresses the *official* (his emphasis) point of view that "closes" the [UFO] problem for many years to come. If you wish, you can continue some microactivities in this field. As for me, I am going to move on to different works." [3]

Well, Zigel was not being wholly truthful. He did *not* move on to different works. True, he did busy himself with other activities — lecturing at Moscow Aviation Institute and Moscow Planetarium, popularizing astronomy, studying the Tunguska problem and so forth. But the UFO problem remained his favorite topic until his death in November 1988. That first volume of *UFO Observations in the USSR* was just a beginning. In the '70s Zigel issued six sequels to this collection, all in Samizdat (that is, more or less clandestine) publication. On a copy of the second volume that he kindly gave me there is a touching inscription: "Please read with care: the number of copies of this work is four!" Since these typewritten Samizdat publications were officially considered as manuscripts, they were — if not too "anti-Soviet" — generally tolerated by the authorities. Only in 1993, after the collapse of the USSR, Felix Zigel's daughter — Tatiana Konstantinova-Zigel — succeeded in publishing some materials from these volumes in a book form [4].

2. A Theoretical Introduction

I have recalled this episode from the life of Dr. Felix Zigel with no intention to "peck" him: aha, he showed an awful lack of determination! Quite the contrary: trying to organize serious UFO studies in the USSR, Zigel exhibited amazing tenacity. On the official plane, he did not achieve anything appreciable, but he did in fact lay the foundation of Soviet ufology as a field of investigations, alternative to official science (but not to common sense).

It so happened that I witnessed and participated

* *Note by the Editor:* A considerably shortened (in particular, devoid of any references) version of this paper was published in the anthology *UFOs: 1947–1997*, London: John Brown Pub. Ltd., 1997. Here it is published in full.

in the whole process of the rise, existence, and collapse (together with the USSR and even a little before it) of that unique phenomenon: Soviet ufology. In 1966 my paper [5] was the first Soviet publication to treat the UFO problem as a serious one, and the book [6], published in 1991, proved to be the first and only Soviet academic monograph taking this approach. (Its synopsis in English may be found in Ref. 7.) History of Soviet ufology would be, to my mind, of interest both to western ufologists and western specialists on the methodology of science (especially to those engaged in the problem of the demarcation between science and pseudoscience). But this paper is not dealing with the history; it will serve only as a "skeleton" for our main subject: the *human dimensions* of Soviet ufology. What does this expression mean?

It is well known that the UFO problem is very contradictory and controversy-generating. However, at least a few things are here indisputable: there exist UFO observations, UFO observers, ufologists (= UFO researchers), UFO debunkers, and UFO adherents. (The last two categories of the "UFO-related people" are not ufologists, since they are not researchers. As a matter of fact, these are just "believers" with their own — "negative" and "positive" — canons, who fight against each other as "heretics", and against the researchers as "atheists".)

Existence of UFOs "in the broad sense", i.e. objects and phenomena remaining incomprehensible to at least some observers does not therefore raise doubt. An experienced researcher, who spent enough time analyzing first-hand data, reading serious literature, and discussing the problem with his fellow-workers, usually comes to the conclusion that the UFO phenomenon "in the narrow sense" (i.e. the objects whose nature and origin cannot be explained in the terms of present-day theories) is also real and no fancy. But even if we restrict our consideration to the "UFOs in the broad sense", there is no getting away from a serious problem situation: man before unknown *in his own* (or "almost" in his own) *environment, his "personal cosmos"*. One usually leaves room in his or her world picture for the unknown "in principle", but mainly or even only in the realm of "science frontiers", far from his/her dwelling place. There can exist inexplicable phenomena among galaxies, or in the world of elementary particles, but not over my dacha! Much like our stone-age ancestors, we still subconsciously divide the outer world into the cosmos (my home, my city, to some extent my country) and the chaos (all that lies outside the cosmos). Strange phenomena may be observed in the "chaos regions" (or in the "frontier" ones, that is "between" the chaos and the cosmos), but my personal world must be fully regularized, and no alien interventions are allowed inside it. Discovering that in fact it is not quite so means quite a shock for any human being.

UFO-like anomalies ("non-periodical transient phenomena") drew relatively little attention at early stages of human history. They appear sufficiently rare and insufficiently significant. When rainbow was a quasi-periodical (although not so much important) anomaly, and, say, earthquake was (and still is) non-periodical, but very significant, such an ephemeral event as a flight of a silver disk leaving no traces or other tangible consequences could attract only superficial interest. Besides, the system of global communications was until recently in a very primitive state, and a local event of such kind had good chances to remain a "thing-in-itself". Everyone can see a rainbow, or experience earthquake tremors, but a picture of the UFO phenomenon has to be *constructed* from separate reports. It is therefore quite natural that the UFO problem arose only in this century, although UFOs were observed in past ones as well.

Thus, after this — somewhat long, but necessary, as I would suppose — digression, let us return to our main subject: man and the UFO phenomenon, or, more specifically, *Soviet* man and the *global* UFO phenomenon. Although the USSR does not exist anymore, we can learn some useful lessons from this story. The history of Soviet ufology is over; the history of the UFO problem is certainly not. The more important is both positive and negative experience of the former.

3. UFOs Before Ufology

There are few Russian UFO reports from the nineteenth century, or earlier times (although their number is not equal to zero and some of them are of much interest). Between 1900 and the Revolution of 1917 many Russian eyewitnesses observed strange lights in the sky, as well as the classic "mystery planes" and "phantom airships" (see Refs. 8 & 9). During the following period, from 1917 to the death of Stalin in 1953, our knowledge is very poor. Such UFO reports as exist are so dispersed in various official or academic archives that only by accident are they retrieved. In practice, this work did not commence as yet. Such reports were generally made by officials; the man in the street thought it prudent to keep silent even when seeing an extraordinary phenomenon. That is why reports about UFOs, observed at that period, were usually made much later.

The reports we possess include some very interesting descriptions of strange crescent-shaped objects (certainly not bolides) which had been observed long before rocket flights began at Kapustin Yar or other Soviet launching sites. This indicates that to consider *all* the crescent-shaped UFOs as missile warheads reentering the atmosphere [10] would be a mistake.

Thus, in July 1923 a "flying moon" was seen during two or three minutes by M.Volosnikov, a steamboat mechanic, on the Vyatka river, not far from the village of Sosnovka. "In superstitious fear I watched its slow flight in a course parallel with ours. This flying object resembled the moon in shape and brightness, although its frontal part was a little lighter and its tail tapered.

<...> [Then] the object turned to the right from our course and vanished behind a forest. <...> All of us, who saw this phenomenon in 1923, have decided it was a "devil"." [4, p. 23]

Interestingly, 25 years later, the *kolkhozniks* (collective farmers) living in the villages near Suzdal, interpreted in similar fashion the nature of a strange object that periodically appeared in their locality. To these people, steeped in old Russian superstition, it was a "Fiery Serpent" embodying the soul of a person who had recently passed away. The "Serpent" resembled "a motor-car headlamp, — related a witness. — However, it had a tail, with which it could stabilize its flight. More often than not it hovered over villages and sometimes glided towards the earth. Once it glided not far from me: I imagined that either a truck, or a tractor with a searchlight was approaching me from behind." [4, p. 47–48]

Another witness of this phenomenon described the "Serpent" as "a luminous ball that did resemble a motor-car headlamp". It hovered at the angular height of 30°–40°, standing out against the dark night sky. "Its color was yellowish-green. To determine the distance to this object was impossible, <...> [but it could be estimated as] 1–2 km. Its visual size was half as big as the moon's angular diameter. This body was a little flattened and seemed to rotate around its vertical axis <...>.

Some minutes later, the ball began to descend and dim. After a few seconds the "Serpent" vanished", but then reappeared three or four times, in ten-minute intervals. Each appearance of the object lasted from three to four minutes. (See Ref. 4, p. 48.)

As for the crescent-shaped UFOs, they were from time to time observed during World War II. Thus, on August 26, 1943, platoon commander Gennadiy Shalaginov was at the Kursk salient, scene of one of the greatest battles of the war. At about 9.30 a.m. he left his observation post and saw "a crescent-shaped object that flew at a very great speed to the SW and soon disappeared from my sight.

The color of its frontal and rear parts was the same: dark-bluish with a play of changing light; at the middle part it merged into light orange.

There was an impression that this huge "dolphin" was breathing: its middle part now diminished, now increased in size. All this picture looked strangely animated and very impressive against the background of deafening volleys of our artillery and countless shell-bursts." [4, p. 24]

Naturally enough, at the time such sightings were usually interpreted as secret fighting craft of the belligerents. For instance, A.I.Klimenko, who observed a low-altitude flight of a UFO in August of 1942 near Krasnodar, did not doubt he was seeing a secret Soviet aircraft. As he recalled some 25 years later, "Thanks to this encounter, I became fully convinced of our final victory!" [11]

It is common knowledge that the UFO phenomenon and the UFO problem "in their full" burst in the West after WWII (1946, Sweden, "a pre-wave"; 1947, USA, the first wave of UFO sightings). As regards the USSR, the press of this country scoffed at this problem from the very beginning. For the first time UFOs were officially mentioned in the speech delivered by the high Party functionary M.G.Pervukhin at a solemn meeting celebrating the 35th anniversary of the Revolution, in November 1952, in which he raised merry excitement of the audience by saying that the Americans fancied "flying saucers" and "green fire balls" in the sky. [12]

This was naturally taken for a kind of instruction, and this country seemed to take little interest in the UFO phenomenon in the 1950s. Yet even then there were enthusiasts, notably Y.A.Fomin, an engineer and lecturer of the Society for Propagation of Political and Scientific Knowledge (later renamed as *Znaniye* Society) who started to collect information on UFOs and gave lectures on the topic.

The witness reports from that time are especially valuable. The position of the Soviet officials was unequivocal: Soviet people never see any mysterious objects in the sky, but even when they sometimes do, specialists can always convincingly account for the events. The "saucers" were persistently ridiculed in the popular media though in stereotyped formulae and without any attempt to analyze and explain the reports.

Not surprisingly, many UFO observations were never reported by their witnesses. On the other hand, those reports that did reach researchers were uncontaminated: since Soviet eyewitnesses, unlike those of other countries, had no idea how UFOs were "supposed" to behave, they did not adapt their reports to match accepted models. Later the situation certainly altered, but until the mid-'80s the "research field" of the UFO problem in the USSR had remained relatively "clean".

Not that everyone in the USSR in the early '50s was ignorant about UFOs; but information was still confined to official agencies. Thus, the chief navigator of Polar Aviation of the USSR, V.I.Akkuratov, mentions a correspondence with the Chief Administration of the North Sea Route concerning observations, in August of 1950, of a disk-like object, which appeared over the settle-

ment of Nizhnie Kresty (in the Kolyma region) for three days running. Six years later, in the year 1956, this same man, piloting a TU–4 plane, was carrying out ice reconnaissance near Greenland. He recalls: "We came out of some cloud, and unexpectedly noticed a strange flying vehicle moving to the left of us, parallel to our course 180°. It looked like a large lens, pearl colored, its edges waving. Knowing of the American air bases in northern Greenland, at first we thought it must be an American aircraft of unknown design. With the intention of avoiding it, we went back into cloud. Forty minutes later, when flying to Bear Island, we unexpectedly came out into clear sky and saw on the left the same vehicle. We decided to examine it closely and swiftly swerved to approach it. The strange vehicle also turned and moved in a course parallel to ours at the same speed. After 15 or 18 minutes of flight it left us behind and went up eventually disappearing into the blue. We saw no aerials, superstructures, wings or windows on the disk. Neither did we observe exhaust gas or a condensation trail, and its speed, when it went away, was so high that it seemed supernatural" [4, p. 73–74].

4. Rises and Falls of the UFO Tide

Despite such observations, the official view remained unshakeable. Y.A.Fomin's lectures evoked great public interest and UFO witnesses began to send their reports to astronomical observatories, planetaria, and editorial offices of various newspapers and journals. But the response of official bodies was far from encouraging. Thus, the Moscow Planetarium had a standard reply letter for all such cases, signed by V.A.Bronshten, a scientific consultant:

"Dear Comrade.........

The phenomenon you observed was, in all probability, due to an experiment that was conducted to measure the density of the atmosphere on high altitudes with the aid of a sodium cloud (like those formed in flight of space rockets)."

This blanket explanation outdoes even the optical UFO theory proposed by Donald Menzel!

In January 1961 *Pravda* published an interview with Academician L.A.Artsimovich who denied the existence of the "so-called flying saucers". "All talk on this issue <...> stems from the same source, namely unscrupulous and antiscientific information contained in lectures made in Moscow by some irresponsible persons. These reports tell fantastic tales borrowed mainly from the American press, dating from a time when flying tableware was the main sensation in the United States <...>. Are there any new facts to make us <...> admit the existence of all this crockery hovering over our heads? No, there are none. <...> The saucers and other material objects, which are said to appear in the sky exist only as reflections on water or as rainbows exist, as the play of light in the atmosphere. All the rest is either self-deception or falsification" [13].

As we see, the "Menzel's mirage" proved to be the most convenient UFO theory for the Soviet establishment and later became a kind of quasi-religious canon. (To what extent the establishment itself "believed" in this canon is a different question.) The "irresponsible" Y.A.Fomin was expelled from the Society for Propagation of Political and Scientific Knowledge, and the Foreign Literature Publishers promptly issued a Russian translation of Menzel's book [14], with a new introduction by the author who was very enthusiastic about the Soviet attitude to the UFO problem.

So, for the space of some five years, amateur ufology disappeared from the Soviet scene. Then in April 1967 the tide returned, with an article "UFOs — What Are They?", written by Dr. Felix Zigel and published in the popular magazine *Smena* [15]. It was followed during the next five to six months by articles in various journals and newspapers (including an important paper by Jacques Vallee and Alexander Kazantsev [16]); their overall sales swiftly reached several millions.

The Soviet people were little by little freeing themselves from the old fear of the totalitarian state; a new generation was rising for which Stalin and his mass repressions were a remote past, Khrushchev with his "thaw" a recent past, and Brezhnev with his socialism with a human-like face the not very terrible (and rather dull) present. Articles about UFOs made a sharp contrast with the tedium of everyday publications in official popular media, and evoked great interest. Whether or not readers were asked to send their own UFO observations, they usually did so. True, these reports remained, as a rule, unpublished (for a rare exception, see Ref. 17).

On May 17, 1967, at 10.08 p.m., I myself happened to witness a UFO sighting over Kharkov. The object was a small round body (a disk, or a ball), some four angular minutes in diameter, shining with bright white light and having a long (some 1°30′ in length) orange tail. It rose in the western sky, traversed its southern part (the maximum angular height of its flight was some 50°) and disappeared approximately to the east. The flight duration did not exceed 20 seconds.

It is quite conceivable that I and other witnesses in Kharkov saw a satellite or a missile warhead reentering the atmosphere, but there was one strange feature: the outer appearance of the object (with its tail) remained the same throughout the observation. It seemed to me not so much like a real phenomenon, but as a moving picture in a planetarium.

In the late 1970s, ten years after Zigel made his collection of reports [2], it was subjected to analysis by three Soviet scientists — L.M.Gindilis,

D.A.Men'kov, and I.G.Petrovskaya. They concluded that for one third of these reports there was no conventional explanation such as optical atmospheric phenomena or aerospace testings (see Ref. 18).

Nonetheless, some two thirds of the UFO reports in the work [2] (mainly dated from 1967) seemed to display the latter. And the ban on public UFO studies in the USSR, that ensued at the beginning of 1968, did have a certain rational basis, which was far from concern for purity of "true science". However much the Soviet scientific establishment overestimated its importance and authority, the main part in this prohibition was played by apprehension on the part of the Soviet military-industrial complex regarding uncontrolled circulation of information on chance observations of new military and space rocketry. Strategic parity with the USA was the chief political goal of the leaders of this country under Brezhnev, and "flying saucers" were not the biggest thing sacrificed for this purpose.

Glavlit, the censorship office, was ordered to prevent any publications on the UFO problem, except those (rather rare however) which said there was no problem. Even the very term "unidentified flying objects" was in fact prohibited. Organized research ceased.

For comparison, in the United States the general situation in the UFO problem was then developing in a similar direction as in the USSR, with the difference, though, that absence of total governmental control over the mass media prevented absolute uniformity of their attitude to the UFO problem. But attempts to set people on the right path were made there too. In November of 1968 the infamous Condon Committee "successfully" accomplished its work, despite newspaper scandals and the obvious prejudice of its head. The main conclusion of its final report* was that "none of the things seen, or thought to have been seen, which pass by the name of UFO reports, constituted any hazard or threat to national security" and "no direct evidence whatever of a convincing nature now exists for the claim that any UFOs represent spacecraft visiting Earth from another civilization" [19, pp. 4, 25]. It was also argued that "nothing has come from the study of UFOs in the past 21 years that has added to scientific knowledge. Careful consideration of the record as it is available to us leads us to conclude that further extensive study of UFOs probably cannot be justified in the expectation that science will be advance thereby". Condon advised the Federal Government to stop collecting and analyzing reports on UFOs.

* I do not consider here the evident contradictions between the conclusion and the contents of the report.

5. Underground–1

The Soviet establishment responded to this by rapturous articles in magazines and newspapers (which were often not quite accurate, to say the least: thus, it was once asserted that the Condon Committee had analyzed "all reports on mysterious objects observed over the territories of the USA and Canada... namely: 12097" [20]). At the same time, the government gave instructions — out of prudence, probably — to "the official bodies that are exploring the atmosphere and space <...> to record and investigate UFO events in order to identify these objects" [4, p. 22].

In practice, however, these instructions in the late '60s — early '70s were not very effective. As for the independent ufologists, they virtually went underground. True, as far as I know, nobody was ever imprisoned for his or her ufological activities. It was permissible to study the UFO problem, individually or even in informal groups. One could, using personal contacts in newspapers, popular-science journals, astronomical observatories, etc., acquaint himself with current UFO reports that were being sent to these bodies by chance observers. The streamlet of such reports did not dry up completely, although it swiftly became fairly thin. From time to time some especially dumbfounded UFO witnesses tried to contact amateur ufologists directly and reported valuable information. Needless to say, under these conditions the reports received cannot be regarded as representative. According to the exact definition by Dr. Zigel, it was a kind of "microactivities". The more interesting seems the fact that its results were not quite microscopic. The ufological research field in the USSR still remained very "clean" and the negative attitude of the authorities to this problem served as a "filter" both against pseudo-observers and pseudo-researchers.

The ufological community that had begun to form in 1967 returned to the "embryonic" existence. In the late 1960s throughout the entire Soviet Union there were no more than 25–30 people actively engaged in UFO studies. In general, they knew each other quite well, exchanging letters and meeting from time to time personally. These "low-profile professionals" collected UFO reports, studied the most interesting cases and typed their reports for circulation within the same small community. Their families were hardly especially happy about these time- and money-consuming activities conducted for the sake of posterity, but at least on a local scale the disinterested enthusiasm of the ufologists was infectious.

Since the immediate prospects of any wider ufological studies in the USSR looked dim, some brave researchers turned their eyes to the West. Our view of worldwide ufology was then sadly incomplete. There were some books in the Lenin Library and the Library of Foreign Literature

(both in Moscow), but no ufological journals and therefore no way to keep abreast of current news. Y.A.Fomin and A.A.Tikhonov were the first Soviet UFO enthusiasts who ventured to communicate with western ufologists — first, with the *Flying Saucer Review* team and the French group GEPA. After them, some other researchers took the same risks, and lo! this proved permissible!

Western ufologists rendered their Soviet colleagues very substantial help in obtaining the special literature, what gave us an idea of what the world ufology was like. Of course, this idea was not devoid of a sort of naivety, so typical for the Soviet mentality: any typographically printed report was almost automatically considered as trustworthy. But there was also a "sip of freedom", as well as a developing understanding of the true scale of the UFO phenomenon and the main traits of the worldwide ufology. True, sometimes its best traits were mistaken for the most typical ones.

At the center of these low-profile ufological activities remained F.Y.Zigel, feeling, however, not very well under the circumstances. From time to time he attempted to go up to another level, but it was as if ill-luck pursued him. For example, in 1967 he prepared (together with V.D.Pekelis) an excellent collection of papers, titled "The Inhabited Universe" and planned for publication by the central Soviet academic publishing house "Nauka" ("Science"). There must have been in this collection a vast UFO section containing papers written by both adherents *and opponents* of the UFO phenomenon. The Vice-President of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Dr. V.P.Konstantinov, being the official Editor of this book, assumed responsibility for its contents, protecting the book from *Glavlit* censors. But in 1969 Konstantinov passed away and soon the manuscript was seized by Academicians L.A.Artsimovich and V.G.Fesenkov and "restructured". "The Inhabited Universe" was published in 1972, having been completely mutilated.

However, the Soviet censorship remained what it used to be, that is an obtuse bureaucratic machine reacting mainly to the forbidden terms — "UFO", "flying saucer", etc. That's why sometimes the "underground ufologists" could successfully dupe it. Thus, in 1970 in the *Znaniye–Sila* journal (with a circulation of 600,000) appeared a remarkable paper by Y.V.Rostsius "The Robozero Miracle" [21], dealing with a very interesting UFO incident that had taken place in Russia as far back as 1663. I cannot refrain from citing here a fragment from the original report (*that was also written in 1663*) — since it is really exceptional, one of few fully reliable testimonies of existence of the UFO phenomenon *in the narrow sense* in the historic past.

So, 335 years ago, a curious phenomenon was witnessed by parishioners of a church, on the shore of Lake Robozero (about 140 km from the city of Vologda). "In the present year 171, in the 15-th day of August, Saturday [i.e. August 25, 1663, by the Gregorian calendar], <...> there was God's advent: from the light heaven, not out of a cloud there came out great fire to Robozero and went to the south, over the lake water, being about twenty sazhens across* or more, and that fire was surrounded by dark blue smoke and ahead of it were two fiery rays twenty sazhens long; <...> then the greater fire and the two lesser ones ceased; and a short time after <...> the fiery flame appeared again over the lake, some half a verst** to south-west from where it had disappeared, and then went dark; and shortly after that <...> at the same distance westwards, a third fire appeared, more terrible in its size than the first, and then declined, having gone to the west; that fire was over Lake Robozero for about an hour and a half <...>. Some peasants were sailing there in a boat and the fire seared them, preventing to come nearer, <...> and the bottom of the lake was lit up, its depth being some four sazhens, and they saw the fish run from the fire towards the shore; and where the fire went, the water surface was scorched and covered with a kind of *rzhavets****" [21, p. 40–41].

It is quite understandable that people living more than three centuries ago near one of Russia's largest monasteries have interpreted a UFO coming as a "God's advent". But their presence of mind is worthy of admiration indeed. These peasants were brave enough, trying to approach the fiery object, and observant enough to notice the running fish in the depths of the lake and the film of *rzhavets* on its surface.

Incidentally, no UFO debunker has ever said anything articulate about the Robozero phenomenon (even the universal — and therefore meaningless — "ball lightning").

In general, Soviet ufologists were rather lucky with lakes and other water bodies (cf., for example, the Korb-lake incident [22] and the recent Mzha UFO traces [23]). But of course, they did not confine themselves to supposed UFO landings, trying to collect as many UFO reports as possible. Having no access to secret data about space and military tests, the researchers could, in many cases, mistake rocket launchings and atmospheric reentries for genuine UFOs. But it is sufficient to scrutinize the seven volumes of Dr. Zigel's collections of UFO reports, to understand that this ore is rich in metal. In fact, it can be noted that the intellectual and professional levels of "underground" Soviet ufology were high,

* 1 *sazhen* = 7 feet.

** 1 *verst* = 1.067 km = 0.6629 miles.

*** *Rzhavets* — a red oxide film on a marsh surface.

despite the hard conditions under which these researchers worked.

6. No Happy Landings

In 1975, Dr. Zigel finally succeeded in opening a state-financed project for UFO studies at Moscow Aviation Institute (MAI). Top officials of the Institute approved a preliminary report for the project and applied to the Civil Aviation Ministry, the Central Meteorological Service Agency, the Institute for Space Research and other organizations for cooperation. It was intended to set up a Scientific and Technological Council for the UFO problem and hold a seminar (on a regular basis).

Zigel gave lectures in scientific research institutes and design bureaus. Everything seemed favorable to serious work... but, according to a saying of the ancients, "a stone on the road can alter the future of an empire". In this case the job of the "stone" was taken on by *Komsomolskaya Pravda* newspaper and the science fiction writer Eremey Parnov. Zigel's lectures so much interested the audience that they were recorded and copied with Xerox machines, typewriters and computer printers. These records contained a lot of mistakes and distortions, but, what is most important, they represented a new kind of *Samizdat* criticizing the official standpoint concerning the UFO problem. On November 28, 1976, *Komsomolskaya Pravda* published E.Parnov's article entitled "The Technology of a Myth" [24] which again declared the problem nonexistent or at least solved by Menzel's book, once and for all. Parnov also granted attention to very incautious statements of Zigel's that UFO publications were prohibited in the USSR. "The very fact that my paper has appeared here, — wrote E.Parnov with noble indignation, — is more eloquent then any words as denial of this base assertion".

The article published by *Komsomolskaya Pravda* was certainly below the status of the "directive" paper of Mustel, Martynov and Leshkovtsev [1]. Nevertheless, it impressed properly the leaders of MAI, the Moscow Aviation Institute. Before long, the Institute sent a letter to high authorities, saying: "F.Y.Zigel is little competent in principles of the Marxist–Leninist theory of cognition and he set about work that did not correspond to his scientific competence and knowledge. <...> At present, MAI carries out no work on UFOs, nor do we plan it for the future" [25, p. 81–82]. The article "Technology of a Lie" sent by Zigel to *Komsomolskaya Pravda* as response to Parnov's paper was naturally refused. Then, apparently by existing tradition, Zigel was expelled from *Znaniye* Society. Thus, the status quo was restored.

7. Underground–2

Soviet ufologists had to return again to their customary low-profile activities. However, unlike the situation of the year 1968, there was no withdrawal of researchers from this field. On the contrary, the informal UFO study group, led by Zigel, was more active than ever. Dr. L.M.Gindilis and his colleagues published their statistical analysis of a set of Soviet UFO reports [18]. Although, contrary to James Oberg's [10] opinion, this work was neither sponsored, nor inspired by any official agency, it represented a leap forward in scientific UFO studies. An informal study group (under guidance of Dr. V.B.Vilinbakhov) was created in Leningrad. This group had many useful contacts among the city civil and military authorities. In Gorky (now Nizhniy Novgorod) some scientists also evinced their interest in the problem.

Enthusiasts in the provinces started "rough" (in fact, most important) work, collecting local UFO data. Thus, A.I.Klimenko, living in Novo-Amvrosievka, the Donetsk Region, took serious interest in the phenomenon and gathered many valuable reports on regional UFO sightings. Sometimes these "grass-root ufologists" were lacking in special training, but their contribution to the progress of Soviet ufology was certainly considerable.

From time to time important UFO cases came to light by pure chance. For instance, staying with friends in Kislovodsk, I met a Mrs E.Loznaya. When informed about my interest in anomalous phenomena, she told me, not without hesitation, about her observation of a flying "Man In Black". The event took place in the winter of 1936 at the 'Oktyabrskiy' state farm (Pavlodar Region, Kazakhstan), when the witness was 15. Needless to say, her knowledge of ufology was precisely zero; Mrs Loznaya even did not read popular-science journals. Indeed, at that time I myself was equally unaware of similar observations here or abroad.

Being very curious about this new (for me) variety of "UFO", I proposed to the journal *Tekhnika–Molodyozhi* (TM) to publish the report as a reader's letter. Since the term "UFO" did not appear in the text, and "flying men in black" were, unlike flying saucers, not banned by the authorities, the censors were not concerned with this anomaly. The "letter" by E.Loznaya was published (see Ref. 26) and a few million Soviet people were able to read the following account:

"Early in the morning I went to school by a lonely country road. It was already light, although the sun had not risen. The weather was fine and it was freezing. Suddenly I caught sight of a dark point moving rapidly in the sky on my left. It came closer, grew larger, and in a matter of seconds I saw a man-like figure dressed in black and seen in profile. The course of its flight formed an angle of about 60 with the road.

"This 'man' was, to my mind, of medium height; his black clothes covered him completely, like overalls. His head (more exactly — something

like a helmet) and massive ('square') arms tightly fixed to his body were perfectly visible. I saw no hands and feet. I could see behind his back an oval thing like a rucksack.

"Looking with fright at the 'flying man' I noticed suddenly that he had changed his course and was now flying towards me. When he turned [I saw] his right arm was slightly bent at the elbow. Now the 'man' was seen full face, but I could not examine his features for in place of a face there was just an entirely black surface.

"At that instant I heard an increasing rumble as if it was a flying mechanism and not a living man. By now the distance between us had shortened to about 40 meters. My numb terror had passed and I had turned back in search of a shelter but there was none on the snow-covered steppe. I then turned again towards the 'flying man' and... saw nobody. Maybe he had made an abrupt change in his course, or maybe he had dived in a snowdrift... but the next moment I was running towards my home.

"This sighting lasted about one minute, but I have remembered it for all these years."

Readers were invited to submit their own remarkable experiences. And such letters did arrive! At the request of TM editors, I read and answered these letters, amazed at their number and quality. Even if the public attitude to the UFO problem was currently negative, following the official line, this was certainly not true of those who had experiences of their own: the individual who had an extraordinary encounter would never again accept the official dogma that the UFO phenomenon was a "myth created by the sensation-seeking western mass media".

The letters included descriptions of conventional UFOs, as well as flying humanoids and a lot of other anomalies. One example from many: a student from Perm (let's call him A.V.K.) wrote on October 26, 1976, that the previous day, when near the village of Soboli (Perm Region) and taking a path through a forest meadow, he had met with a giant "man", some three meters tall. The figure was dressed in "something like a diving suit, although there was no river or lake within 5 km". Smiling and repeating *"drugo, drugo"* (somewhat garbled Russian word *drug*, that is "friend"), he held out a thick bundle of banknotes! The student allegedly snatched only one of them: it proved to be a 50-rouble note (not a small amount twenty two years ago). After that the figure suddenly rushed to the forest, and the astonished A.V.K. fled to the village. His letter was probably written in the heat of the moment, for he never responded to my subsequent letters. (I asked him to preserve, for goodness sake, the note for laboratory studies and carelessly used the word "criminological", having nothing bad in mind.) Whether or not this story is for real, I simply do not know; neither am I aware of similar cases elsewhere. But the recipients of extraterrestrial monies (if any) would have hardly burnt with desire to reveal the source of their well-being.

Such local cases are valuable to the researcher, but of course they made no impact on public opinion, less still on official one. As a whole, the Soviet UFO situation remained immovable. To change it, a large-scale UFO event was much needed. And finally such an event did in fact occur!

8. A Turning Point

In the early morning of September 20, 1977, the residents of the comparatively big city of Petrozavodsk (capital of the Karelian Autonomous Republic) saw a luminescent jellyfish appearing in the dark sky and throwing "a multitude of thinnest ray spurts" over the city. Thanks to careless censorship, the incident was reported by the first (provincial) issue of *Pravda* newspaper of September 23, as well as by the morning issues of *Izvestiya* and *Sotsialisticheskaya Industriya*. It raised a lot of questions within the Soviet Union and beyond. Today we know that the "Petrozavodsk phenomenon" occurred almost (but only *almost*) simultaneously with the launching of the "Cosmos–955" satellite from the Plesetsk launching site. Though it had its anomalous features (for details see Ref. 27), what was important about the incident was that it was the stone which triggered an avalanche.

Following the event, a special project was initiated at the Institute of Terrestrial Magnetism, Ionosphere & Radio Wave Propagation of the USSR Academy of Sciences (IZMIRAN) to investigate the physical nature of anomalous atmospheric phenomena. Despite its methodological limitations (necessary, though, to rigorously pose the problem), this was the first UFO-related project to be carried out by the Academy. It marked the beginning of open professional studies into the UFO problem in our country. On the base of the IZMIRAN project there was later set up an Expert Group on Anomalous Atmospheric Phenomena of the USSR Academy of Sciences.

The Soviet military also stirred and became more attentive to "anomalous phenomena". In particular, a MoD (Ministry of Defense) research institute, located in Mytishchi (near Moscow) began to collect UFO reports and foreign ufological literature. The latter task was solved, by the way, quite simply: UFOs were included in the *secret* lists of "forbidden subjects" issued by *Glavlit*, consequently ufological books and periodicals sent from the West to Soviet amateur ufologists were confiscated from the mail on "legal" grounds. (During many years before, in spite of the strict prohibition of the three letters U.F.O. appearing in the Soviet press, the same letters on the cover of a foreign book were a kind of permit for Soviet customs officials. Bu-

reaucracy!) Those big libraries, which obtained ufological literature by exchange with western ones, immediately began to keep it in *Spetskhrans* (special repositories of forbidden books). After abolition of the system of *Spetskhrans*, I found in the catalogue of the no-more-forbidden publications in the Russian State Library (formerly Lenin Library) more than a hundred titles of American and European UFO books. Alas, I did not find there my copy of Story's *The Encyclopedia of UFOs* that had been kindly sent to me from England by the late W. Raymond Drake. Probably, it is still in Mytishchi.

Like their colleagues in France and elsewhere, Soviet UFO amateurs tried to cooperate with the Mytishchi institute, but it was a one-way cooperation. The institute officials accepted readily any UFO reports, photographs, etc., but never returned them, nor gave any data in exchange. Here is an interesting parallel with the practice of the French official UFO group GEPAN/SEPRA. Both of these bodies are real "black holes".

By the early 1980s, the number of amateurs was increasing sharply. In Moscow, Leningrad, Kiev, Kharkov, and elsewhere, various scientific and technical societies and journals organized public clubs for investigation of "anomalous phenomena in the environment" (the very term "UFO" was still half-taboo; on the other hand, the concept of "anomalous phenomena" fitted the character of the subject of inquiry unexpectedly well). When the first Ukrainian meeting on anomalous phenomena was held in Kiev in 1981, there were twelve doctors of sciences and forty-five candidates of sciences participating. In February of 1984 scientifically oriented UFO amateurs united into the Commission on Anomalous Phenomena of the Committee on the Problems of Environmental Protection of the All-Union Council of Scientific Technical Societies (ACSTS).

The resolution of the Kiev 1981 meeting stated in particular that "in the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, on the ground surface and also in the near space a large group of complicated phenomena are constantly observed, by means of physical instruments and visually, which defy being simply explained as well-known natural phenomena or as being due to the human technological activities. This group of phenomena referred to as anomalous phenomena in the environment is to be studied profoundly in the interests of the science and practical activities of the human society..." (quoted from: [28, p. 29]).

In succeeding years other conferences and seminars followed (in particular, the interdisciplinary scientific-technological schools "Non-periodic transient phenomena in the environment", Tomsk, May 1988 and May 1990). The scientific level of the reports presented was variable, admittedly, but they represented a serious desire to come to terms with the problem.

The Expert Group of the Academy of Sciences concentrated on collecting reports from official sources and analyzing pseudo-anomalous phenomena arising from launching of rockets and spacecraft, and the Commission of the ACSTS on the large scale collection, verification and analysis of reports of chance eyewitnesses. The researchers were particularly interested in "close encounters" with UFOs.

Now that the USSR Academy of Sciences had in all but name accepted the reality of the UFO problem, its publishing policy underwent some changes. The official academic publishing house — "Nauka" ("Science") — commissioned myself and the Vice-Chairman of the Academic Expert Group on Anomalous Atmospheric Phenomena, Dr. Y.V.Platov, to write a book which would provide an introduction to the UFO problem for the Soviet academic community. Naturally, we agreed to write the book, our manuscript obtained the approval of several high-ranking academic readers, and in 1991 it was published under the title *UFOs and Modern Science* [6].

Whereupon, the Soviet Union collapsed. I cannot assert with confidence that there is any cause-and-effect connection between these two events — beyond, maybe, a kind of quasi-Jungian synchronicity. But anyway this work of ours was and will for ever remain the first and the last Soviet academic monograph on the UFO problem. *Sic transit...*

9. From Alleged "Pseudoscience" to Real Pseudoufology

When *perestroyka* began, the new climate greatly facilitated the work of amateur societies: membership grew rapidly. By mid–1988, censorial prohibitions of UFO observation reports were largely relieved; by 1989 they no longer existed. And still, there was no real breakthrough in the development of ufological studies. In fact, rather the reverse: "big science", feeling first tremors of the approaching financial problems for its "normal" fields of research and *not* feeling any noticeable interest on the part of the State that still supported it, did not move for an inch towards the UFO problem. As for ufology, formerly united against the totalitarian state, it now disintegrated into three camps:

1) Tabloid ufology, comprising "ufologically-oriented" journalists and the like, attracted by the now-permitted chance to write sensational articles: they were very rarely experienced researchers.

2) "Principally amateurish" ufology, largely composed of local UFO study groups and regional associations. The plan was to gather them all beneath an umbrella — the Soviet Ufological Association (SUA) and the so-called UFO Center, led by Dr. V.G.Azhazha. As a rule, these people sincerely believed that when the efforts of UFO

amateurs were united, the UFO problem would be solved very soon.

3) Scientific ufology, incorporating those rather rarer individuals and groups who aimed to transform ufology from a marginal field of cognitive (at best) interest into a truly scientific field of investigations.

Well, the main principles and aims of "tabloid ufology" are quite understandable and simple. It has no relation to *research* in the proper sense of this word. But it is significant that an attempt to form "new ufology" as a "popular quasi-science" has resulted in a rapid shift of the amateurs from concentrating their efforts on "usual" UFO sightings to hailing contactees and abductees and to face-value acceptance of their "messages". The temptation of "simple solutions" proved to be a characteristic feature not only of science (a UFO = an optical or plasma phenomenon), but of UFO amateurs as well. ("We are genetically exploited by the aliens! Fly for your genes!" — this is not a tabloid, this is a self-styled leading ufologist.)

After the collapse of the USSR and formation of the CIS these tendencies came into particular prominence. "Big science" has lapsed into a half-comatose state and practically forgotten about the UFO problem; a great part of the UFO amateurs began to chat with spirits of the dead. (For instance, at the 5th ufological conference of the CIS International Ufological Association that was held in Moscow in October of 1996 there were two reports titled "Dialogues with Oleg Dal" and "Seance of communications with Oleg Dal". It only remains to explain that Oleg Dal was — a brilliant, I must admit — Russian actor who passed away several years ago.)

Nonetheless, I would not sink into pessimism. There are in the CIS countries some researchers, UFO study groups, and organizations that aim at really scientific studies of the phenomenon. We have serious specialists, engaged in ufological studies, as well as (and this is extremely important) a considerable number of scientists, scholars and engineers who are not prejudiced against the UFO subject matter (as distinct from the majority of their western colleagues). They are ready to study it seriously and professionally. This can lead, in its turn, to achieving a very essential "intermediate aim" — assimilation of the UFO problem by science. Being not just one of cognitive systems of our terrestrial civilization, but rather its cognitive system *par excellence*, science must not turn a blind eye to the unknown. Otherwise it will quickly become a system of ignorance.

10. Some Conclusions

It must be admitted that Soviet Man lived in a rather comfortable world. The State took care of him, guaranteed him employment, gave him a home, free medical help, and a pension after 60. His income was low by western standards, but so were his expenses. Intellectually, too, it was a secure world: he was brought up to regard the printed word as something sacred. What he read in *Pravda* was truth. (When the journal *Znaniye–Sila* published in 1967 a jocular article titled "Giraffe? That's a myth!", there came heaps of readers' letters asking to explain what's to be done: a friend told he had seen a giraffe in a zoo! But that was just *Znaniye–Sila*, not *Pravda*!)

And now this stagnant world has been invaded by something strange, alien and possibly dangerous (though Soviet science-fiction has always depicted extraterrestrials as humane, highly advanced, and of course sharing communist ideals). Anyway, no UFOs were foreseen by K.Marx, F.Engels, or V.I.Lenin, neither were they mentioned in the recent decrees of the Party and State. How should the man or woman in the street react? And how should he or she react when the Party and State have expressed their definitely negative attitude to these phenomena?

In this situation the following main patterns of behavior of Soviet Man are discernible: a) as a human being; b) as an element of the Soviet society. What is interesting, almost every Soviet UFO witness, when encountering a phenomenon completely foreign to them, followed the first pattern, accepting the event's objective reality. And what is no less interesting, most scholars and scientists, when getting acquainted with reliable information about an anomalous phenomenon, followed the second one, sacrificing the phenomenon's objective reality in favor of their socially-induced picture of the world. Sometimes these patterns intermixed: a professor who saw a UFO at his dacha not far from Moscow and in the heat of the moment informed a ufologist about this, was a few days later begging the latter to forget this information.

On the whole, there is no particular enigma in these types of human behavior. Enigmatic seem deviations from the second — "normal", in a sense — pattern. Truth must not endanger well-being, or else it is not truth. In the West, where the climate of "educated" opinion is generally against anomalous phenomena, these patterns are also traceable. But there is a difference between opposing a climate, and defying a totalitarian state, particularly when it is the only employer existent. In this sense, the intellectual level of Soviet UFO debunkers may be estimated as high: they knew well which side their bread was buttered.

Thus, when encountering a UFO (especially at a close distance) man displays, as a rule, his best qualities, owing to which he survived in prehistoric times: first of all, the ability to face the truth. At the moment of the encounter "theoretical" considerations (whether or not the phenomenon "can" exist) are losing much of their importance. Usually the witness proceeds from

the assumption that it is real and maybe dangerous; that's why he runs away, or shoots, or, at best, tries to examine a strange object. *Later on*, he is gradually realizing that the event was "impossible". This troubles him as a rupture of the tissue of his "personal cosmos". Nonetheless, with the passage of time (if there are no new "encounters with the unknown"), the recollection of the event is "encapsulated", like a foreign object in a healthy body. (Interaction between witnesses' recollections and information, spread by the mass-media, is a separate question, worthy of separate consideration; but in Soviet times there was practically no interaction of this kind, since the media kept silence on the subject.)

A man who did *not* see any UFOs personally, but got acquainted with a set of UFO reports (by pure chance, or performing his official duties) finds himself even in a more difficult position. On the one hand, he did not experience the "immediate reality" of the phenomenon and the latter remains for him somewhat phantasmal. At the same time, he is dealing not with a chance event, without noticeable (as a rule) consequences, but with a system of data displaying some regularities and therefore, in a sense, *more* convincing than an individual observation. The spectrum of possible human reactions is in this case rather broad, but, not going into superfluous details, one can outline the following four main patterns:

1) Indifference. "Maybe the phenomenon is a reality, maybe not. One way or another things will settle themselves." General public (and a major part of the scientific community) react just in this way. It can be named "an ostrich reaction".

2) Denial. Debunkers fight with UFO reports, trying to prove all this is nonsense and fearing it may be not so and the "rupture in the tissue of the cosmos" may prove to be quite real.

3) Whole-hearted acceptance. UFO adherents try to "heal" the "rupture", taking it for real either with a "positive" complexion ("our space brothers!"), or with a "negative" one ("help! help! cosmic rape!").

4) Research work. A set of UFO data is examined and the researcher either gets into one of the aforenamed three groups (though on a more "noble" ground), or remains in his consciously chosen research position, admitting reality of the phenomenon, but not jumping to conclusions about its nature. He realizes that before it will be possible to find the solution of this mystery, it is necessary to create ufology as a scientific field of study.

Such an attitude provokes, however, discontent both on the part of the authorities and the masses: are you scientists?? then why cannot you explain us, from where all this stuff (i.e. UFOs) appeared?! But to my mind, this "persecuted minority" occupies the most rational position. After the fifty-year UFO controversy, we are still at the stage of creating ufology. In this sense, social differences between the images of the UFO phenomenon in the West and in the East are of only secondary importance. However he may be conditioned to react subsequently, when his feelings have had time to cool, at the time of the event a Russian, a Frenchman and an American will react alike, in a simple, instinctual way — simplemindedly perhaps, yet more wise than some academies of sciences. That's why I would like to describe here, in closing, an incident that happened to a Soviet driver in 1969, whose letter is in my archives.

This driver, Nikolay Zinov, aged 36 at 1969, was on a prospecting expedition in Kazakhstan, at the Dzhambul settlement. On September 11 he was returning by truck (a GAZ-63) from another settlement, Karazhal, together with an engineer, a geologist, and a laboratory assistant. They left Karazhal after dark, by an unfamiliar road, and lost their way. About 5 a.m. Zinov stopped his truck, deciding to wait for dawn. The motor was still idling.

Suddenly he noticed a moving luminous point in the sky. When the point approached the truck, they all saw a flying "man" of normal height dressed in a silvery scaly "space suit". He flew silently, in an almost horizontal position, his arms extended horizontally, over the truck at an altitude of some two meters, landing about 25 meters away.

"I swiftly turned my truck in his direction and switched on my headlights. The man stood still on the ground and was clearly visible. The geologist told me to go and ask him the right way. I jumped out of my cab and ran towards the man. I wished to come right up to him, greet him and learn, where we were. When I was about three or four meters from him, the man rose smoothly to an altitude of about 2.5 meters. I took one or two steps more and addressed him, forgetting even to say a word of greeting: "Comrade, we're lost, show us the right way!" There was no reply, but the man started flying off to the left, gaining altitude as he went."

Zinov quickly returned to his truck and followed the man at a distance of some 20 meters. Soon it grew light, and they found themselves on a good dirt road. Taking a glance around, the travellers understood that they had missed their settlement by a hundred kilometers. And the "man" in the silvery space suit went on ascending until he (or it?) disappeared in the morning sky...

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A SHAME AND A CRIME!

Anonymous

Note by the Editor: *A typescript of this paper was given to me in 1973 (I do not remember the exact date) by Dr. Felix Zigel. As far as I can judge, he did not know the name of its author — having, at the same time, some doubts about "Smolensk" as his dwelling place. Dr. Zigel believed he (or she) must have been a Muscovite.*

The paper seems to me an interesting relic of the epoch, both simple-hearted and not devoid of sense. Probably it was meant mainly for distribution among UFO amateurs — although some details in the text point to the author's intention to draw the state authorities' attention to the actual situation regarding the UFO problem. The unknown author sincerely and naively wished to help his beloved state to be in the vanguard of human progress not only in orbital space flights, but in ufological studies as well; it's not his fault the Soviet state proved to be deaf to the voice of reason. Other states are hardly more intelligent...

* * *

On October 18, this year [1972, — *Ed.*], five years have passed since the day when the UFO Department of DOSAAF [The USSR Voluntary Society of Support to the Army, Aviation & Navy, — *Ed.*] All-Union Space-Exploration Committee was formed. True, it is more properly to say "would have passed" — taking into account the fact that this Department existed for little more than one month. The main task of this public body was to collect UFO reports throughout the Soviet Union, as well as to assess them from a scientific point of view. Some 350 people attended the first (and, as it turned out to be, the only) meeting of the UFO Department that was held in The Central House of Aviation and Cosmonautics (Moscow) on October 18, 1967. There were present TV, radio and newspaper people. At this meeting, the Bureau of the Department (headed by Major-General P.A.Stolyarov) was elected, four sections were constituted: historical, theoretical, international, and one for collecting reports, having in total some 200 members, and a program of active investigations of the UFO phenomenon was developed.

As a first step, on November 10, 1967, P.A.Stolyarov and F.Y.Zigel appeared on Central TV. They informed the audience of the UFO Department's birth and appealed to witnesses of UFO sightings, asking them to send in their reports. Subsequently these reports formed the basis for the first collection of UFO observations in the USSR[1] containing some two hundred UFO reports, printed on an offset duplicator in a very limited number of copies. Unfortunately, this success proved to be the only one. Opponents of UFO studies also became exceptionally active, their activities taking singular forms. No real importance was in fact attached to discussions and lectures, in which the UFO problem was proclaimed to be a fiction. Suffice it to say that these lectures were mainly given by Moscow Planetarium workers V.A.Bronshten and I.F.Shevlyakov... One would hardly dare to affirm that it was the influence of these people that led to the disbandment of the UFO Department at a special session of the DOSAAF Central Committee, convened late in November. *Nobody* from the Department staff was invited to this session.

Proponents of UFO studies naively believed that a scientific problem, however strange it could seem at first sight, should be examined by scientific methods only. Therefore they also gave several lectures on the subject matter. Besides, on February 5, 1968, there was held in The Central House of Journalists a discussion on the UFO problem. Some prominent scientists took part in this discussion: the full members of the USSR Academy of Sciences B.N.Petrov and M.A.Leontovich, the corresponding member of the same Academy E.R.Mustel, the member of the Czechoslovak Academy of Sciences E.Kolman, as well as scientific workers from a number of Moscow research bodies and educational institutions. When summing up results of the discussion, Academician Petrov said:

"Do UFOs exist? I can't object to this. But the question remains: what are they? <...> ..I would like to note that at present scientists do not try to reject obvious things."

...But the lot of the UFO problem [in the USSR, — *Ed.*] was in fact decided not in open dispute, but in machinations having nothing to do with science. Some mighty forces came into operation, for which the question of UFO reality was not a theme of investigation, but a field of the "battle of faith", a clash of "defenders of scientific truth" with "heretics". In so doing, the "defenders of scientific truth" acted, strangely enough, only with administrative methods, not with scholarly ones. A month after the decision of the DOSAAF Central Committee (and a month before the discussion in the House of Journalists), the Branch of General & Applied Physics of the USSR Academy of Sciences, headed by Academician L.A.Artsimovich, adopted a resolution, *condemning* UFO studies in the Soviet Union. As the problem *a priori* could not be considered as scientific, the authors of the resolution did not even attempt to examine any UFO sighting. The good old principle was in use: one should not argue with heretics, one must struggle against them.

...Well, the struggle was quite successful. On February 29, 1968, there appeared in *Pravda* an article, entitled '"Flying Saucers" Again?' signed by the corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Chairman of the Astronomical Council of the Academy E.Mustel, President of the All-Union Astronomical and Geodetical Society Dr. D.Martynov, and the Learned Secretary of the National Committee of Soviet Physicists V.Leshkovtsev. Now it is certainly too late to argue with this article. Its main aim was to authoritatively reassure the public, not to debate anything. One cannot however help but give two or three examples of *incompetence* of its authors in the subject under discussion.

If the article begins with the truly remarkable news that the "myth about flying saucers" was disproved by Soviet and foreign scientists a few years ago; if Menzel's books are declared the last word in the UFO problem — as if there never appeared the works of Ruppelt, Vallee, Michel, the collection *UFO Evidence* and hundreds of other books and papers analyzing various aspects of the phenomenon; if, finally, the whole UFO problem is treated as "absurd, long-buried gossip about secret excursions of Martians or Venusians to our planet" — then one cannot help but to call such a approach a thoroughly cultivated ignorance.

E.Mustel, D.Martynov, and V.Leshkovtsev allege that no astronomer ever observed a UFO... Being specialists in astronomy, they must know that there exist some phenomena of an inherently sporadic nature that can only be studied from the reports of chance observers. These are, for example, bolides and ball lightning. It is completely impossible to plan an observation of a bolide beforehand, but the phenomenon does certainly exist. The well-known Soviet astronomer I.S.Astapovich wrote in this connection: "Since the phenomenon is very rare, the astronomer and geophysicist must either give up the very idea to study it in detail, or use materials provided by chance observers."[2] What is more, a bolide cannot return, whereas UFOs can in fact reappear over the same area. Zufar Kadikov, an astronomer of Kazan Station-Observatory AOE [the meaning of these initials is unknown to me, — *Ed.*], when observing recurrent flights of crescent-shaped UFOs, determined some linear parameters of the latter:[3] speed (5 km/sec), altitude (100–120 km) and the size of the crescent (some 600 m). These figures and the shape of the object do rule out such explanations as "an artificial satellite, a booster rocket, a weather balloon".

Now let's look at another statement of the authors. At the end of the article they wrote that (*even!*) American scientists, having examined "11000 more or less reliable reports about observations of "flying saucers", ...became convinced these did not contain any evidence of reality of such objects." Since the "Condon Committee" had not completed its work by the paper's publication, the authors probably meant the conclusions reached by the "Blue Book"... E.Mustel, D.Martynov, and V.Leshkovtsev "forgot" about 647 (from 11000) UFO cases, officially recognized as reliable, informative and inexplicable in terms of conventional theories. They also "forgot" about the dissenting opinion of the former scientific consultant of the US Air Force Dr. J.A.Hynek, who had kept abreast of every American UFO observation during 20 years. "I have studied hundreds of reports that cannot be regarded as mistakes or mystifications, — wrote Hynek, — and had to come to the conclusion that, notwithstanding the lack of physical evidence, the word "fiction" must be deleted from the titles of articles on UFOs...; I think that the scientific community faces a problem that may be equivalent to the problem of Copernicus." [This is a back translation from Russian. Unfortunately, I could not trace the source of this quotation. — *Ed.*]

Should one, however, worry about the scholarly integrity of the article's authors, when their simple human honesty does not shine at all? Participating in the UFO discussion in the House of Journalists on February 5, E.Mustel — a corresponding member of the USSR Academy of Sciences, Doctor of Physics and Mathematics, Chairman of the Astronomical Council of the Academy — said: "I can't deny that such objects are observed, but we don't know, how they can be studied."

Three weeks later, Mustel signed the article in *Pravda*. What is it, if not hypocrisy?

Academician L.A.Artsimovich did not sign the article. Nonetheless it was he who played the chief part in "closing" the UFO problem. During the last five years he has been doing his best to maintain a ban on UFO studies in the USSR. It is hardly a mere chance. As far back as the early 1960s, Academician Artsimovich publicly opposed any research work in the field of "flying saucers": "There exist no facts that would have supported the idea that some mysterious material objects, the so-called "plates", or "saucers", are flying over us. All talk on this issue, so popular recently, stems from the same source, namely unscrupulous and antiscientific information contained in lectures made in Moscow by some irresponsible persons."[4]

In fact, by "irresponsible persons" there was meant mainly one person — Y.A.Fomin, a lecturer of *Znaniye* Society, who had attempted in late 1960 to enlighten the public about the real situation regarding the UFO problem. The results of this attempt were rather pitiful: Y.A.Fomin was expelled from *Znaniye* and a series of articles appeared in the press, blaming the "absurd rumors" and appealing "to put an end to the dissemination of these fairy-tales, however exciting they can seem".[5] To which absurdities sank the "defenders of scientific truth", one can judge from the fact that for several years Moscow Planetarium replied to any UFO report with a standard letter informing the reporter that he or she had seen... a sodium cloud, produced by a Soviet research rocket. ...Not even the American Air Force getting its hand in at explaining away the UFO phenomenon could boast of such a brilliant "solution" of the problem.

For the last five years, as I said before, UFOs are considered in the Soviet Union non-existent. Any paper on this subject matter is in fact personally censored by Academician Artsimovich. Speaking in the "diplomatic" language, it "cannot be published if not permitted by the Academy of Sciences". Such permissions are given by the Branch of General & Applied Physics — that is, in practice it is Academician Artsimovich who makes the decisions. As a result: the last paper objectively treating the UFO problem appeared in the press in January 1968.[6] As a result: the [Soviet, — *Ed.*] scientific and popular-scientific press completely twisted conclusions of the "Condon Report", proclaiming the Condon Committee to have *proved* that UFOs do not exist. As a result: even the book *UFOs Identified*, by P.Klass, translated and announced for publication by *Mir* Publishers, was excluded from the plans of this publishing house. The reason was that its author, developing the "plasma" hypothesis [of UFO origins, — *Ed.*], adduced at the same time a lot of UFO sightings, and any unbiased reader could understand that not all of them were explainable from this point of view. One can recall that it was the Russian translation of the book *Flying Saucers* by D.Menzel (issued in Moscow in 1962) that — what a paradox! — awakened fresh interest to the UFO problem in this country. It is the more remarkable, since the book was translated with the aim to put an end to discussions around "flying saucers".

Of course, nobody wished or wishes to forbid activities of private persons in the UFO field. But what can be done by an individual researcher, or even by a research group, when no information on UFO events may appear in press and be analyzed. As a matter of fact, such enthusiasts found themselves in the state of a meteorologist having to study phenomena of nature, not leaving a hermetically sealed room.

It would be of interest to learn, whether or not Academician Artsimovich is acquainted with [first-hand, — *Ed.*] UFO materials. Probably not, since in none of his articles did he ascend (some-

body would have said: descend) to examination of concrete facts. But if we are wrong, and Academician Artsimovich is in fact acquainted with the existing facts and able to distinguish between the 1959 New Guinea [UFO, — *Ed.*] flap and the 1967 Donetsk–Lugansk one, as well as between the [UFO, — *Ed.*] observation of the Honored Navigator of the USSR V.I.Akkuratov (1956) and the Socorro case (1964), then it is permissible to ask: by what can one be guided, rejecting not only separate hypotheses trying to explain the phenomenon, but the very *possibility* to investigate it.

Indeed, nowhere in the world is the UFO phenomenon investigated at present by official institutions (at least, we have got no contrary data). But in the USA, as well as in Britain, France, Japan, and many other countries there have been working for a few decades strong groups of UFO enthusiasts, collecting and analyzing information on UFO observations, publishing research reports, books and journals. At the moment, when it becomes evident that the UFO phenomenon does deserve a serious study, all the information collected by these groups of [UFO, — *Ed.*] amateurs can be easily concentrated and examined by governmental scientific-research centers. The only country that will find itself completely helpless will be the Soviet Union. Again, as it happened more than once in the past, we will have to "overtake and surpass", but no efforts, no money will suffice to compensate at a short time the lack of systematic observations. This would be the equivalent of trying to understand the patterns of solar eclipses or supernova explosions, using the data for only one year.

When reminding the reader about the lot of genetics and cybernetics [in the USSR, — *Ed.*], you take the risk to look boring — but how can we forget so quickly the lessons of history. When the question "who is right?" is transformed into the question "who is guilty?", truth is not born in the debate, but perishes in it. If the opponents of the cosmic origin hypothesis of UFOs had wished to discuss the problem on the truly *scientific* level, they could have done this freely both in the press and in public lectures; but when one group of scholars has a monopoly of truth, declaring its point of view to be the only correct one — this is infamous and unscientific!

The energies, devoted in this connection by Academician Artsimovich and his colleagues would have deserved admiration, if we had forgotten about the aim to which they are spent. No wonder that the UFO problem may be kicked by irresponsible journalists (say, in the style: "...the "flying saucer" nonsense has declined. Scientists have said their weighty word; false stories of self-styled "eyewitnesses" have burst like soap-bubbles!";[7] quite another matter, when an authoritative representative of ruling circles of official science, vested with real powers, is doing the same. The [Soviet, — *Ed.*] government does not regard itself as competent in strictly scientific questions; it quite rationally awaits a verdict of the scientific community and comes to certain conclusions only after obtaining it. The more responsible must be the scientists; the more unbiased and conscientious must they be when examining the problem. The intentional distortion of facts, deceiving the public, the unjustified ban on developing a problem that may show the greatest promise — all that is a crime against the country!

In this connection, I cannot help recalling the words by the great founder of cosmonautics Konstantin Eduardovich Tsiolkovsky, said by him in May 1927:

"There was much laughing and denial. It is easy and pleasant. There were many murders as well. But what disgrace has been brought upon humanity that strangled great ideas, mutilated and destroyed that which subsequently proved to be beneficial for itself. When will we, the people of today, get rid of this vice, ruinous for ourselves?

In civilized countries this human defect is already understood; there new ideas are rarely exposed to laughing and persecution. But in less civilized countries both mockery of and more decorous silencing of weak and frail new-born ideas is widespread. Criticize well-established ideas, resounding throughout the world, but encourage new-born ones until their destiny is determined!"[8]

October 1972, Smolensk

Notes and references by the anonymous author

[1] Zigel F.Y. *UFO Observations in the USSR.* Vol. 1. Moscow, 1968.

[2] Astapovich I.S. *Meteor Phenomena in the Earth's Atmosphere.* Moscow, 1958.

[3] Zigel F.Y. *UFO Observations in the USSR.* Vol. 1, p. 51, 63.

[4] *Pravda,* 1961, January 8.

[5] Ibidem.

[6] Dobronravov V.V. To Look for Truth. — *Vokrug Sveta,* 1968, No. 1.

[7] Eidels L. Review of the Russian translation of the book *Flying Saucers* by D.Menzel. — *Znaniye–Sila,* 1962, No. 9.

[8] Quoted in: Rynin N.A. *Interplanetary Communications.* Installment 7, Leningrad, 1931.

EDITOR: Vladimir V. Rubtsov
RIAP
P.O.Box 4684
310022 Kharkov-22
UKRAINE

E-mail: <vladimir@riap.ticom.net>